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Resistance and repression: Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day*, Sigurd Hoel's *Møte ved milepelen*, and Kirsten Thorup's *Mørket bag dig*

Jørgen Steen Veisland[1]

Abstract

The article examines the relationship between members of the British aristocracy and German Nazism in the 1920's, 1930's and 1940's. The examination is extended into an analysis of the resistance movements in Norway and Denmark during the occupation 1940-1945. A significant issue is the infiltration of democratic, non-repressive societies perpetrated by German Nazis during World War II and the decades leading up to it. The article is not historical. It is a literary interpretation of the socially, politically and psychologically complex conditions making up the crisis of World War II, based on the three novels. The analysis of Kirsten Thorup's novel *Mørket bag dig* includes an account of the rescue of the Danish Jews. The rescue operation was undertaken for the sake not only of the Jewish people but also for the sake of the preservation of democracy as an ethical and humanistic institution.

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Introduction. Narration as disclosure.

In Kazuo Ishiguro's novel *The Remains of the Day* (1989) and in Sigurd Hoel's novel *Møte ved milepelen* (1947) the first-person narrators, both of whom are male (the butler Stevens in Ishiguro's novel; an un-named person in Hoel's novel), initiate an act of remembrance designed to disclose their involvement in the repressive politics of Nazism that resulted in the outbreak of World War II. Through the process of recollection repressed material emerges, revealing the narrators' morally ambivalent relationship to social and familial patterns of domination. Psychic patterns of domination come to be seen as a tragic emulation and extension of a repressive power structure spreading throughout Europe in the two decades leading up to the war. Kirsten Thorup's *Mørket bag dig* (2023) employs a split narrative voice: the novel is told by a second-person narrator, *you* (*du* in the original Danish), whom we may designate as the second voice of the protagonist, the woman Harriet. It is a reflective voice, located at a slight distance from the protagonist and alternating with her first-person descriptions of the events occurring in Denmark during the 1940-1945 Nazi occupation. The subtle fusion of first-person and second-person narration endows the text with a polyphonic voice mirroring the highly nuanced, non-ideological perspective of the female protagonist.

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The three novels extend the inner voices of the narrators into a description of dramatic political events while slowly revealing subconscious patterns of complicity – personal complicity in the case of the two male narrators, and the complicity of other characters in the case of the woman narrator. These patterns are inherently structured like repetitions and assume a Freudian undertone which breaks through the barrier between the subconscious and consciousness, disclosing a compulsion to repeat. The narrative act is aesthetically and ethically constructed to contradict and divert this compulsion. The act of creation may be described as a form of *narrative transformation.* In *Reading for the Plot* (1984) Peter Brooks, in a section on "Freud's Masterplot", refers to Tzvetan Todorov's model of narrative transformation:

> […] plot is constituted in the tension of two formal categories, difference and resemblance. Transformation – a change in a predicate term common to beginning and end – represents a synthesis of difference and resemblance; it is, we might say, the same-but-different. Now, "the same-but-different" is a common (and if inadequate, not altogether false) definition of metaphor. If Aristotle affirmed that the master of metaphor must have an eye for resemblances, modern treatments of the subject have affirmed equally the importance of difference included within the operation of resemblance, the chief value of the metaphor residing in its "tension."[2]

Brooks says that repetition works as a "binding of textual energies that allows them to be mastered by putting them into serviceable form, usable "bundles", within the energetic economy of the narrative."[3] However, the three narratives I am examining in what follows constitute an *unbinding* of textual energies through the overt act of difference present in the metaphor as a rhetorical form of subversion.

The subversion of dignity. *The Remains of the Day.*

Dignity is a primary characteristic of the butler Stevens who has the dual function of first-person narrator and protagonist in Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day* (1989). The present time of the narrative is 1956 and Stevens has been given leave of absence by the new owner of Darlington Hall, Mr. Farraday, an American. Lord Darlington has passed away after several years' of declining health. Stevens' leave of absence affords him the opportunity to drive through the English countryside, Dorset, Devon and Cornwall on a six-day journey culminating in a visit with Miss Kenton, former housekeeper at Darlington Hall. Stevens has received a letter from Miss Kenton who left her place of employment twenty years ago to get married. Stevens hopes that she will return to Darlington Hall.

The narrative is constructed as a recollection through which Stevens reconstructs the past and starts a slow process of disclosure of his former employer's relationship to Nazi Germany before and during World War II. Lord Darlington decided already in the 1920's to support Germany because of the disastrous Versailles Treaty which burdened Germany with payments of massive war debts as stipulated in the treaty after World War I. The Lord believes the allies' treatment of Germany was unjust and starts organizing meetings with leading German politicians, meetings that culminate in an international

[2] *Reading for the Plot,* 91.
[3] *Ibid.*, 101.

conference in the early 1920's and in meetings with Ribbentrop as late as the mid-1930's. Lord Darlington intends to find constructive ways to bring about Germany's economic recovery.

Stevens' recollections during the drive through the countryside open up the butler's complex relationship to Lord Darlington and the Lord's support for Germany. Stevens' thoughts revolve around the concept of dignity which he makes repeated attempts to define; he also recalls several significant interludes with the housekeeper Miss Kenton, interludes which disrupt the butler's emotional distance and begin to penetrate his dignified *persona.* Dignity is shown to be an effect of repression, a mechanism working in Stevens' mind as a psychic force serving dual ends, the repression of desire and political repression, i.e., the repression of democratic tendencies in Great Britain.[4] The narrative reveals a pattern of repetition: British aristocracy, represented by Lord Darlington, emulates the Nazi repression of freedom and democracy. The Lord embraces authoritarian rule as based on culture and education and views democracy as government by the uneducated masses.

Stevens' unravelling of the past is a veritable *recherche du temps perdu.* Commenting on Marcel Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past* in the essay "The image of Proust," Walter Benjamin states:

> When we awake each morning, we hold in our hands, usually weakly and loosely, but a few fringes of the tapestry of lived life, as loomed for us by forgetting. However, with our purposeful activity, and, even more, our purposive remembering each day unravels the web and the ornaments of forgetting. That is why Proust finally turned his days into nights.[5]

During his trip to meet with Miss Kenton Stevens often has a problem sleeping, staying as he does at unfamiliar inns. At night he starts to unravel "the web and the ornaments of forgetting" and this activity continues during the day. His journey is interrupted from time to time when his car, Mr. Farraday's Ford, runs out of gas and he finds himself stuck between tall hedgerows blocking the view to the landscape. The hedgerows and the open countryside serve as a metaphor enacting the dynamics of sameness, closure, and difference, openness.

The hedgerows also reflect the closed space of the semi-dark corridor leading to the kitchen through the servants' quarters at Darlington Hall. Here Stevens had frequent encounters and arguments with Miss Kenton, encounters during which the woman tried in vain to persuade the butler to relinquish his dignified, unemotional *persona.* On one such occasion Miss Kenton remarked that Stevens exhibited a curious aversion to pretty girls on the staff, and during another encounter, this time in Stevens cold, dark pantry, she tried to liven up his living quarters with a bouquet of red flowers while commenting that the butler was always buttoned up and reluctant to show feelings of any sort. A dramatic confrontation takes place when Stevens informs Miss Kenton that two Jewish girls had to be fired on the order of the Lord, a decision the housekeeper disagreed with adamantly. The Lord later on regretted his decision.

Stevens insists on maintaining his dignity, pinpointing it as "something one can

[4] The slow undermining of the faculty of repression is an effect of the unbinding of textual energy. Through the act of difference, unbinding reveals the desire that Stevens has barred from consciousness. Stevens' narrative act is generated by a textual energy conducive to insight.

[5] "The image of Proust", 202.

meaningfully strive for throughout one's career"[6] and which certainly includes serving one's employer to the best of one's ability. The butler's dignity mirrors the Lord's honour. Repressed erotic desire poses a threat to dignity, a mode of conduct instilled by culture and education. Stevens faces another challenge to his dignity when Mr. Farraday starts joking, engaging in bantering, a British word for joking around. The butler fails to understand his employer's jokes and decides to learn how to banter in an effort to be polite. Learning to joke amounts to yet another form of repression and Stevens' efforts become an ironic prolonging of the culturally induced dignity he already possesses.

In *The Joke and its Relation to the Unconscious* Sigmund Freud writes:

> Through our culture's work of repression, primary possibilities of enjoyment, now spurned by the censorship within us, are lost. But all renunciation is very difficult for the human psyche, and so we find that tendentious jokes provide a means of reversing [the process of] renunciation and of regaining what was lost.[7]

In the evening of day six Stevens finally meets with Miss Kenton, now Mrs. Benn, and regains, yet does not regain what was lost. He is disappointed to learn that Miss Kenton will not return to Darlington Hall as her marriage is stable. Stevens is taken aback by Miss Kenton's statement that she would occasionally think of a different life she might have had, for instance "I get to thinking about a life I might have had with you, Mr. Stevens."[8] Stevens reacts as follows:

> It took me a moment or two to digest these words of Miss Kenton. Moreover, as you might appreciate, their implications were such as to provoke a certain degree of sorrow within me. Indeed – why should I not admit it? – at that moment my heart was breaking.[9]

After Miss Kenton has gone home Stevens stays at the pier in the local town, Weymouth. Evening is drawing close and the lights are turned on. People gather and start laughing and joking, bantering. Stevens reflects that it would indeed be appropriate for him to improve his bantering skills so as to please his employer. Stevens' education once again prevents him from being spontaneous. Joking is something one must learn.

Yet his recollections serve to disclose the manner in which Lord Darlington's honourable motives, his wish to help Germany recover economically, are taken advantage of by German politicians and construed in the British press as outright support for Nazism. Stevens' remembrance illuminates the potential affinity of British elitist nobility and Nazi ideology. Stevens' narration conducts him through the looking-glass. On the other side he discovers an inverted world where the familiarity of aristocratic honour and dignity has metamorphosed into the unfamiliar face of terror.

The spotless narrator. *Møte ved milepelen.*

Remembering through the act of narration is equally significant in Sigurd Hoel's novel *Møte ved milepelen* (1947). The narrative occurs like an unravelling of forgetting by putting fragments of a diary into a structured

[6] *The Remains of the Day,* 33.
[7] *The Joke and its relation to the Unconscious*, 98.
[8] *The Remains of the Day*, 239.
[9] *Ibid.*

whole in an effort to get at the truth about the Norwegian resistance movement during the German occupation 1940-1945. Hoel's novel calls to mind Martin A. Hansen's novel *Løgneren* (The Liar, 1950). The shuffling and re-shuffling of papers is a narrative act designed to disclose the truth by exposing a lie. The narrator *cum* protagonist of *Møte ved milepelen* (Meeting at the Milestone) is nameless but goes by the nickname "the Spotless" because of his clean-cut, honest appearance and his devotion to the cause of resistance. Like the narrator of Hansen's novel, Johannes Vig, the Spotless unravels what has been forgotten, creating a remembrance of the past that exposes his guilty relationship to the young woman Kari (a cover-name – her real name is Maria) with whom he was involved in a serious love relationship before the war, in the 1920's. When she got pregnant he abandoned her and she married the physician Carl Heidenreich, one of several converts to Nazism, all of whom former classmates of the narrator.

The exposure of guilt by remembrance of the past, i.e., the early 1920's when the narrator was a young student, reveals the complex dialectics of lying and telling the truth. In his essay "On the Essence of Truth" Martin Heidegger notes that truth has to do with openness, stating that "Western thinking in its beginning conceived this open region as *ta alethea,* the unconcealed,"[10] adding that "Ek-sistence, rooted in truth as freedom, is exposure to the disclosedness of beings as such."[11] The philosopher goes on: "The question concerning the essence of truth thus first reaches the original domain of what is at issue when, on the basis of a prior glimpse of the full essence of truth, it has included a consideration of untruth in its unveiling of that essence."[12] Heidegger concludes that "concealment is then undisclosedness and accordingly the untruth that is most proper to the essence of truth."[13] The lie forces the truth to appear. Moreover, the dream is the key to reality. In the dark-chamber of the mind the dream and the lie act like the photographer's liquid, transforming the negative to a positive.

The Spotless has frequent vivid dreams and nightmares, images of a tragic past painted in striking colours showing the connection between repressive, punitive parents and the oppressiveness of Nazi ideology. The narrator describes how one of his classmates was regularly beaten by his father for neglecting to observe Christian doctrine and practice. The narrator indicates that parental oppression became a clear motivation for alienated Norwegian youth to rebel and join the Nazis. Another distinctive motive was the need for faith in a dogma that afforded meaning and purpose in life. The Spotless is convinced that the major motive behind joining the enemy was existential rather than ideological. Young people in the Norway of the decades leading up to World War II and the German occupation are seen by the narrator as homeless and nameless, much like the protagonist of Knut Hamsun's novel *Hunger* (1890) which is quoted several times.

The narrator is captured, imprisoned and tortured by the Gestapo and his former classmate Heidenreich, Kari's husband. Kari/Maria rescues him, appropriating her husband's keys, and brings him to safety. He finds out that Kari has a son, Karsten, a fanatical Nazi. Karsten is his son, appearing towards the end of the novel in a vision, accusing his father:

> I saw Nazism as our illegitimate child.
> Conceived in blindness and cowardliness,

[10] "On the essence of truth", 6.
[11] *Ibid.*, 7.
[12] *Ibid.*, 8.
[13] *Ibid.*, 10.

> betrayed in the maternal womb and left to himself, going hungry.
>
> And I saw us, the spotless ones, the righteous ones, stand there saying:
>
> We don't know you!
>
> And the cock crowed.
>
> And I saw him, our son, change his features, turning into the robber Barrabas. And I saw him bare his teeth at us and laugh, saying:
>
> You didn't know me? You were right not to! Be a liar and a coward. That is best for you![14]

The narrator recognizes that he has betrayed love and let down the mother of his son. The betrayal is also a betrayal of self and causes a fatal distortion of the innate creative power of youth, forcing the young person to embrace a perverse faith.

As the narrator puts the fragments of his diary together he admits that he has failed to understand significant events in his life and the life of his contemporaries. Yet he claims that he has had a unique experience "put together of past cowardice and present evil, crude accident and iron-hard nemesis."[15] Fragments of experience may transcend the pattern imposed upon them by the narrative. The narrative order may constitute the lie while the disorderly fragments may contain the essence of truth.

A woman for life and liberty. *Mørket bag dig.*

Kirsten Thorup' novel *Mørket bag dig* (2023; The Darkness Behind You) is the second volume in a trilogy about the woman Harriet Bertram. As in Ishiguro's and Sigurd Hoel's novels the narrator/protagonist, Harriet, is in search of the truth; however, in this case the search occurs as a narrative act that is almost simultaneous with the narrator's experience. Harriet has a fervent wish to know the complex reality of World War II, the Nazi occupation of Denmark, and the Danish resistance movement.

The first volume in the trilogy about Harriet, *Indtil vanvid, indtil døden* (Unto Madness, Unto Death, 2020) describes her visit in the fall of 1942 to a Danish friend, Gudrun, and her husband Klaus, an officer in the German army. The author is currently working on the third volume of the trilogy.

Harriet's connection to Nazi Germany is incidental. Her husband Gerhard Bertram was a pilot serving in the Finnish-Russian war, fighting on the Finnish side on the East Front alongside the German air force battling the Soviet Union. Gerhard was shot down and Harriet is now a widow. Her independent personality makes for a stark contrast to the fanatical ideological pursuits characteristic of a lot of people during the war period. Harriet is unique in that she not only adopts an attitude of neutrality but also possesses a mind which spontaneously fuses self and other, sameness and difference. I will explore this singular ontological and ethical phenomenon in my interpretation of *Mørket bag dig.*

The Nazi indoctrination of young people, a prevalent feature in Norway as portrayed in Sigurd Hoel's novel, is also witnessed by Harriet during the visit to her friend in Munich in 1942, described in *Indtil vanvid, indtil døden*. It becomes clear in a conversation between the two women how significant the Nazi doctrine is. Gudrun expresses despair because her son Thor is wild and exhibits signs of maladjustment. Crying, she addresses Harriet and says: "How is he going to succeed and attain a position in das Reich with his ill will and naughty behaviour?"[16] Another incident

[14] *Møte ved milepelen*, 323-324. All translations from Hoel are mine.
[15] *Ibid*., 321.
[16] *Indtil vanvid, indtil døden*, 115. All translations from Thorup are mine.

reveals the pressure young people are under and their rebellion against the dictates of the Nazi Party. A waitress in a local restaurant tells Harriet how her son has run away in order to join a group of young anti-Nazis hiding in the woods and singing illicit songs.

Harriet has been exposed to gossip because of her husband's affiliation with the German Luftwaffe during the Finnish-Russian war. Back in Denmark she was an easy target of judgmental sentiments. She comments:

> Explaining the other side of Gerhard's choice got to be too complicated and boring if all the nuances were to be included. And I don't want to bore anyone. Let people think and believe what they want. Yet another of my principles. Gerhard fought for freedom. But freedom under responsibility, as he emphasized and lived by.[17]

Harriet speaks with the author/narrator's voice here. The irony of the statement to the effect that too many nuances makes the discourse boring attests to a narrative problematic having to do with the narrator-reader relationship. This relationship relies on persuasion, i.e., the narrator's ability to create a text that dissuades the reader from gullibility and prejudice. Harriet's nuances are the author's nuances. The literary text is a political and ethical act whose aim is to induce an non-hegemonic perspective into the mind of the reader. This is an essential aesthetic and ethical act in an age characterized by domination.

In his book *Culture and Domination* (1985) John Brenkman comments on Herbert Marcuse's work *The Aesthetic Dimension*, stating that "Marcuse's later aesthetics insists that art has an affective rather than cognitive power and that its value lies in the aesthetic sublimation of reality rather than in any critical reflection on reality."[18] Brenkman goes on to argue that "the social dialectic of art does not arise from the conflict between a divided reality and a unified work, but rather takes the form of conflicts *within* the work, including the conflict between its unity and its division."[19] Brenkman refers to Adorno's essay "Lyric poetry and society" where the philosopher talks about the poet's voice as something purely individual; however, the individual voice of the poet is, Adorno argues, "in itself social in nature. It implies a protest against a social condition which every individual experiences as hostile, distant, cold, and oppressive."[20]

Harriet's poetic voice is a social voice. In *Mørket bag dig* we are in occupied Denmark in the year 1943 and Harriet has moved into an apartment in Copenhagen with her two young sons whom she had left with friends while in Munich. Her attitude to local politics is critical. She supports the resistance movement which increases its activities during the spring and summer of 1943. She comments on politics: "You have resigned from political infighting. You maintain a low profile. You hate politics. Hate the hypocritical, lying politicians. The political double-game. You have been immersed in an acid bath and has become apolitical. Only love remains."[21] She sticks to a nuanced perspective on the

[17] *Ibid*., 33.
[18] *Culture and Domination*, 107.
[19] *Ibid*., 108. Brenkman's comment on the conflict within the work is pertinent to our understanding of the three novels. The intrinsic conflict possesses multiple aspects or dimensions. Among them we may identify the pervasive polarities of sameness-difference; remembering-forgetting; an ordered-disordered narrative. These conflicts appear in the discourse as a subjective introspection as well as a social critique, endowing the narrative with a dynamic force.
[20] "Lyric poetry and society", 65.
[21] *Mørket bag dig*, 11.

situation in Denmark. In an especially intense argument with Ghita, an anti-communist sympathizing with the German occupying power and voicing anti-Semitic sentiments, Harriet expresses support for Danes who had beaten up a German soldier following a demonstration by shipyard workers in Odense. The demonstration was violently repressed by the Germans.

Harriet's involvement with the resistance movement becomes intimate after a member of the resistance, Knud Skou, moves in with her as he needs a place to hide. Harriet has been working for Baron von Schalburg's Memorial Foundation, a beneficial agency dispensing aid to the families of Danes killed in the Finnish-Russian war. Harriet discovers that the head of the memorial fund, Helga von Schalburg is secretly pro-German and that the accountant Detlevsen is embezzling funds. Further, a young destitute woman, Katharina Michelsen, has problems being accepted for financial aid because of the bureaucratic set-up of the foundation.

Knud Skou's work in the resistance movement is vitally important as he is in shipping and thus directly involved in organizing maritime escape routes to Sweden for Danish Jews. The Gestapo has started arresting Jews and deporting them to the German death camps so the matter is urgent. Knud and Harriet have fallen in love and Knud has moved into Harriet's bedroom and is now becoming a member of the family. Harriet loves him deeply and worries because he is often gone for days at a time, working to find disembarkation harbours on the west coast of Sjælland and Store Bælt. Despite Knud's commitment to the resistance movement and his hard work in shipping, rumours start circulating; insinuations from unknown sources imply that Knud was attached to a military school in Germany in 1940 and that he has informed the Germans about a weapons depot in Copenhagen. He disproves the rumours and things calm down; eventually, however, he is accused of treasonous activities by someone high up in the resistance hierarchy. His friends persuade him to escape to Sweden but the plans are aborted in the last minute. He decides to stay in Copenhagen, a fatal decision; Knud is liquidated – or murdered.[22]

The liquidation, or rather, murder of Knud Skou is yet another manifestation of the corruption within that haunted the Western allies during World War II. The familiar pattern of repetition asserts itself, appearing as an emulation of the psychic repression and the political oppression of Nazism. The act of liquidation might as well have been carried out by the Gestapo. At the root of the murderous act we detect a fanatical search for absolute purity. Each faction of the resistance movement has its own firmly set idea of how to effectuate liberation. The slightest moral or ideological blemish is interpreted as treason. The fanatical, essentially puritanical adherence to an either-or perspective eliminates the individual, the human subject. Harriet opposes and contradicts fanatical dogma by virtue of

[22] The fictional Knud Skou is based on the actual lieutenant in the Danish army, Knud Skou, who was an active member of the resistance during the occupation. Due to his experience in shipping he carried out the transportation from Sweden to Denmark of a shipload of three thousand Swedish Husqvarna mashine guns destined for the Danish resistance movement. A conflict between the military and civilian sections of the resistance movement regarding the distribution of the weapons broke out. Skou was accused of handing too many guns to the civilian resistance and also accused of stealing or misappropriating guns. Initial historical research indicated that a person or persons high up in the military ordered the liquidation of Skou. This was disproved by subsequent research. Knud Skou was murdered and the motive for the murder remains obscure. He was shot November 23, 1944. The author's version of the murder of Knud Skou is an example of fiction approximating reality to a higher extent, perhaps, than historical research. Kirsten Thorup's narrative, as told by Harriet, reveals the psychologically and politically complex, and ethically dubious relations within the Danish resistance movement.

an ontologically based selfhood: she possesses a self that includes the Other. In a telling passage Harriet speculates as follows:

> Perhaps your mother and her brothers and sisters used to play with kids in the many poor Jewish families in her neighbourhood. And maybe she had a Jewish friend in her young days, before she met your father. Theoretically you could have been half Jewish, that is, someone else.[23]

Harriet integrates sameness and difference in her self, a self that is 'someone else'. Immanuel Kant's ontological concept of Being-in-Itself is an unattainable state of Being, an objective Being undisclosed to human cognition; such is the *ontos* feeding political fanaticism. This *ontos* becomes the iron of dogma. The contradiction to Kant's concept of Being is Jean-Paul Sartre's Being-for-Itself, Being as *subject* rather than object. Harriet is the human subject that lives and makes liberty possible.

Harriet slowly recovers after Knud's untimely death but she is beset by anxiety up to the very end of the spring of 1945 as final liberation draws near. Nevertheless, she knows that through Knud's friendship with the younger members of the resistance movement she has been cleared. The final sentence of the novel reads "Let liberation come."[24]

The crossing. *Outis*

One day in the early fall of 1943, while walking through the working-class district Nørrebro in Copenhagen, Harriet notices that a lot of people are carrying suitcases, obviously leaving home. After boarding a bus a young woman addresses her, calling her attention to the fact that sabotage has almost ceased during the last few days. She tells Harriet that the saboteurs and members of the resistance are busy bringing Danish Jews to safety by escorting them to harbours on the coast of Sjælland where fishing vessels are waiting to take them to Sweden.

The rescue of Danish Jews was initiated October 2, 1943. A total of seven thousand two hundred and twenty Jews were brought to safety in Sweden by boat in the month of October. Four hundred and sixty-four Danish Jews had, unfortunately, been deported to the concentration camp Theresienstadt prior to the rescue operation. The majority of Danish Jews were brought to safety in Sweden. All resistance groups were involved in the operation. Most of the members remained anonymous for reasons of safety. Those who chose to publish their names after the war had ended on May 5, 1945, were later awarded the Yad Vashem (Righteous Among the Nations) honour by Israel.

The maintenance of anonymity was essential for survival of everyone during the occupation, naturally including both the Danish Jews and members of the resistance. The tactics of anonymity relates to the problem of identity in general. The transcendence of self and the sublimation of the self into an other, into the someone else Harriet speculates she might be, eventually terminates in and attains its ultimate goal in Being as No One. In Homer's *Odyssey Book 9,* Odysseus, when asked by an angry Polyphemus what his name is, replies that his name is *outis,* no one. When the cyclops' friends inquire who has blinded him and who is attempting to kill him Polyphemus says: "Friends, Outis/no one is killing me by deceit and not by might."[25] They misunderstand his statement and abandon him.

The transcendence of a fixed identity appears in the thought of Heraclitus who,

[23] *Ibid*., 224.
[24] *Ibid*., 529.
[25] *Odyssey Book 9*, line 408.

approximately 2500 years ago, in the form of the riddle and the paradox, eliminated the border between sameness and difference and between subject and object. The at-one-ness of subject and object creates or *is* Being's own innate heterogeneity. The form of thought itself becomes formless, and eternity is a child at play. In his *On the E at Delphi* Plutarch reflects on Heraclitus as follows: "All mortal nature, lying between generation and destruction, offers only a dark and unstable show and appearance of itself … reason can grasp nothing which is at rest or which is really real."[26]

The tension between the same and the different; subject and object; and real and unreal is an essential part of the dynamics of the artwork. Dror Pimentel's book *Aesth-ethics. Of Hospitality in Art* (2025) explores this tension, proposing the thesis that the artwork becomes an ethical act by virtue of the inclusion of subjectivity. The human individual, Being as subject, is enhanced by being disclosed; the act of disclosure, *alethea*, is a consequential ethical act. Discussing Anselm Kiefer's painting *Your Golden Hair, Margarete/Dein goldenes Haar, Margarethe* (1981) Pimentel says that we are to understand the painting as "a site of hospitality for Shulamith, who is hosted in the picture in a spectral manner."[27] The picture, the author argues, exists in an in-between state: between the pictorial and the sculptural; between landscape and portrait painting; and between words and paint. The title of the painting is taken from Paul Celan's poem "Death Fugue" (1948) which finishes with the lines "your golden hair Margarete/your ashen hair Shulamith."[28] Pimentel comments that "Gold is the colour of the home and of life, whereas ashes are the colour of exile and death."[29] The Golden Age of Greece and Germany's Golden Past are destroyed by ashes. The transposition of ashes into the hair of the Jewish woman Shulamith makes ashes a metaphor not only of Auschwitz but also of the death of the German Golden Past. The ashes signify dissolution and destruction from within. By a tragic irony, the fire and ashes of the death camps have always been innate to Nazi Germany. The adoption of the pseudonym *outis* makes possible an escape from gold and ashes both.

The physical crossing of the water between Denmark and Sweden is also an internal crossing. The boat is the mode of escape suspending the Jewish refugee between home and exile. The Jew becomes Ulysses carrying the no-name of *outis* in the positive sense of a Being transcending identity. The brief interval of the passage facilitates an experiment with Being that may be resumed once the Jewish diaspora has been replaced by a home in Israel. The real home may be the hosting of difference: sublimated Being.

Conclusion. Dignity, spotlessness, and Harriet.

In *The Remains of the Day* and *Møte ved milepelen* we witnessed the effective undermining of dignity and spotlessness respectively. Significantly, the exposure of these self-images was not carried out by an impersonal narrator but by first-person narrators/protagonists. The narrative discourse was an act of self-reflection, an ironic unravelling of forgetting, i.e., repression, in a complex remembrance of the past. As a consequence, personal loss and moral complicity were disclosed and opened up to further reflection in narrator and reader. The subtle moral and psychological penetration of

[26] Quoted in Barnes, *Early Greek Philosophy*, 70.
[27] *Aesth-ethics*, 185.
[28] "Death Fugue", lines 41-42.
[29] *Aesth-ethics*, 207.

authoritarianism and repression, represented by German Nazism, is portrayed and dissected in these narratives in a persuasive voice that includes the reader in a profound process of reflection.

In *Mørket bag dig* we observed a narrator-protagonist fundamentally different. The woman Harriet, present in the text as 'I' and 'you', was seen to challenge a predominantly male perspective, the tendency to emulate and perennialize authority, through her singular capacity to search for facts and nuances *in the real, historical present* while the men had to dig for those same facts and nuances while looking back. The temporal distance between present and past in Ishiguro's and Hoel's novels is striking. It adds a further dimension to the process of repression and signifies a psychic obstacle to the rendering conscious of forgotten subconscious content. The pushing back of self-evaluation into a distant past entails tragic moral and political consequences.

The immediate self-reflection and the social, political observation taking place in Thorup's novel bring the individual and the environment into the foreground of the text. The proximity of the rhetorical 'I' and 'you' facilitates an immediate comprehension in the protagonist's and the reader's minds of what is going on. Furthermore, the rhetorical split between 'I' and 'you' is healed as it is modified by being fused into a unity: the unity of 'same' and 'different'. Thorup's subtle rhetorical manoeuvre produces a discourse that is one with the experiencing and thinking process of the protagonist, Harriet. The discourse *is* Harriet and vice versa. Harriet lives in the present and therefore has a powerful voice.

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